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ABSTRACT

This study examined relationships between level of teacher burnout and professional variables (grade level taught, class size, years of teaching experience, highest degree earned) and personal variables (sex, age, income, health status, marital status). Level of burnout was measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which produces data on three categories of burnout--emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Responses from 1,091 elementary and secondary school teachers to the MBI were analyzed. Significant differences in levels of measured burnout among teachers were evident for two professional variables--grade level and years of teaching experiences. Subsequent t-tests on these factors provided the conclusions that secondary school teachers exhibited a higher level of measured burnout, and teachers with fewer years of experience exhibited a higher level of burnout. It is suggested that working with adolescents in a high school environment may be more stressful than working with younger students, or that the environment of the elementary school is more supportive of teachers. The finding that teachers with fewer years of experience exhibited higher burnout raises concerns as to the maturity level, including coping ability, of younger teachers to handle the daily stress demands of school. A reduction in measured burnout exhibited by teachers as they gained experience suggests that certain coping skills are acquired in the field. Neither the class size variable nor highest degree earned variable produced any significant differences among groups. Personal variables identified as significant included sex, age, and race. Females exhibited higher measured burnout than males, white teachers exhibited higher burnout than minority group teachers, and younger teachers exhibited higher burnout than older teachers. (JD)

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Teacher Burnout: A Study of Professional and Personal Variables

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Variables associated with pupil achievement have been the focus of considerable research over the years. Recently two major studies have attempted to examine the relationship of specific teacher behaviors within the domain of time to achievement (Brophy and Evertson, 1976; Denham and Lieberman, 1980). Of fourteen major findings derived from the latter study, nine established relationships between teacher behavior and pupil achievement. Both studies verify the widely recognized belief that the teacher is a most important variable in pupil learning.

In recognition of the importance of the teacher as a factor in pupil achievement, educators are devoting considerable attention to the identification of variables associated with teacher effectiveness. In recent years, one particular variable, burnout, has emerged as a possible strong influence on teacher performance.

The term "burnout" has been coined in reference to a gradual diminishment over a period of years of commitment and enthusiasm by teachers for their jobs. A recent Rand Corporation study on educational change concluded that teachers "peak out" after five to seven years on the job (Hechinger, 1980). The National Education Association states that based on a survey of 1.8 million teachers, one-third would not enter teaching if they were beginning their careers again (Serrin, 1979). Walsh (1979) points out that in 1962 more than one-fourth of all teachers had 20 years of experience, while in 1976 the number had been cut in half.

Walsh refers to the work of Bloch (1978) and Maslach (1977) in identifying conditions associated with burnout. They include:

-a reaction of the nervous system to stress, leading to a variety of physical diseases;
-A disruption of personal or professional life as a result to occupational stress;

-destructive feelings of emotional stress as a result of ineffective coping;
-loss of concern and detachment from those with whom you work;
-a cynical and dehumanized perception of students, accompanied by a deterioration of the quality of teaching.

Walsh suggests that burnout, sometimes referred to as battle fatigue or combat neurosis, may be caused by the stressful conditions associated with teaching. Such factors as pressure precipitated by accountability laws, large classes, low salaries, intense pupil dependence, declining community support, and minimal opportunity for professional renewal appear to take their toll on teachers, causing them, over a period of time, to become lackadaisical in their responsibilities and mediocre in their performance.

In order to assess the impact of burnout upon teacher performance, additional data is needed on the influence of numerous personal and professional variables upon levels of burnout. Research by Maslach (1977) indicates that burnout can lead to deterioration in job performance. Identification of factors associated with high levels of burnout should provide educators an opportunity to establish modes of support and inservice to combat burnout and its concomitant decline in effectiveness.

Purpose

Many educators view burnout as the product of stress resulting from the interaction of professional pressures with personal responsibilities and/or traits. The purpose of this study was to identify professional and/or personal variables associated with burnout. The study focussed on relationships between level of teacher-burnout and ten variables. Professional variables included grade level taught, class size, years teaching experience, and highest degree earned. Personal variables were sex, age, race, income, health status,

and marital status. The relationship between the ten variables and level of burnout constituted the ten hypotheses of the investigation as exhibited in Table 1.

Table 1.-Summary of Hypotheses

Variables	Level of Burnout
Professional	
grade level	H^1
class size	H^2
years teaching experience	H^3
highest degree earned	H^4
Personal	
sex	H^5
age	H^6
race	H^7
health status	H^8
marital status	H^9
income	H^{10}

Instrumentation

Level of burnout was measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (1980). The MBI produces data on three categories of burnout - emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. According to Maslach, emotional exhaustion describes the feeling of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work; depersonalization describes an unfeeling and impersonal response toward service recipients; personal accomplishment describes feelings of competence and successful achievements in one's work. The MBI is a twenty-five item Likert-type scale. Nine items comprise emotional exhaustion, five items depersonalization, and eight items personal accomplishment. High responses indicate experienced burnout for emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, while low responses correspond to burnout for personal accomplishment. For the three categories each subject responds in terms of frequency and intensity. The seven-item Likert scale ranges from never to very strong (intensity) and every day (frequency).

Methodology

The sample for this investigation consisted of 4,000 teachers randomly selected from the public school teacher population of the State of Mississippi, as reflected in a computerized listing provided by the State Department of Education. In the spring of 1981 each subject was mailed a packet which included a data sheet seeking information on the variables being studied and a copy of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). After four weeks, a follow-up reminder was sent. Usable responses were received from 1,091 teachers.

Statistical Analysis

The responses to the data sheet and MBI were tabulated. Data was statistically analyzed to test for significant differences among categorized groups for each of the ten variables as shown in Table 1. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) program from MINITAB (1976) was used for statistical testing of hypotheses.

Results

Of the ten hypotheses depicted in Table 1, five were significant at the .05 level based on analyses derived from ANOVA computations. The specific variables identified as significant included grade level, years teaching experience, sex, age, and race. Mean MBI scores for significant hypotheses are exhibited in Table 2.

Table 2.-Summary of Means Scores on MBI For Ten Variables

Variable	Emotional Exhaustion frequency-intensity		Depersonalization frequency-intensity		Personal Accomplishment frequency-intensity	
Grade Level						
K-3	18.3	24.9	5.12*	6.80*	35.9*	41.1*
4-6	18.0	23.8	5.89	7.67	34.6	39.3
7-9	18.2	24.8	6.99	8.98	33.4	37.5
10-12	16.7	24.2	6.29	8.65	33.9	39.5
Class Size						
1-14	16.7	23.0	5.47	7.30	33.1	38.6
15-20	18.2	23.9	6.24	7.98	34.2	39.5
21-25	17.1	24.2	5.66	7.95	34.9	40.1
26-30	18.2	25.2	6.25	8.34	34.5	38.9
30-above	18.9	26.8	6.21	8.27	33.7	40.4

Table 2.-Continued

Variable	Emotional Exhaustion frequency	Emotional Exhaustion intensity	Depersonalization frequency	Depersonalization intensity	Personal Accomplishment frequency	Personal Accomplishment intensity
Yrs. Tchg. Experience						
1-3	18.1*	25.2*	6.44*	8.63*	34.4*	40.0*
4-7	19.6	27.1	6.58	8.70	34.3	39.5
8-12	18.6	26.2	6.31	8.47	34.0	39.2
13-20	16.5	23.2	5.34	7.58	35.0	40.4
21-30	14.8	18.9	5.36	6.45	32.7	36.4
30-above	11.8	16.1	3.50	4.67	35.7	41.2
Highest Degree Earned						
Bachelor's	18.1	24.8	6.14	8.11	33.9	38.9
Master's	17.4	24.4	5.79	7.86	34.5	39.7
Spec.+	16.1	21.8	5.84	7.91	35.1	39.6
Sex						
Male	15.7*	22.3*	7.04*	9.52	32.9	38.3*
Female	18.3	25.1	5.60	7.48	34.7	39.8
Age						
20-25	18.7*	25.6*	6.58*	8.72*	35.2	40.3
26-35	19.3	27.2	6.72	9.03	34.4	40.0
36-45	16.5	23.3	5.40	7.55	34.5	39.5
46-55	15.9	20.8	4.90	6.30	33.8	38.4
55-above	13.3	16.5	4.53	5.48	33.4	36.5
Race						
Black	14.1*	18.7*	4.71*	6.21*	32.7*	38.9
White	18.6	26.0	6.30	8.52	34.7	39.5
Health Status						
Excellent	17.3	24.2	5.93	8.00	34.6	39.8
Other	19.4	25.7	6.09	7.83	32.1	36.9
Marital Status						
Married	17.9	24.8	6.01	8.12	34.4	39.4
Other	16.6	23.0	5.77	7.50	33.8	39.5
Income(Thousands)						
0-9,999	15.0	19.7	5.90	6.95	33.6	38.4
10-14 999	17.1	24.0	5.87	7.66	32.9	39.0
15-19,999	17.8	23.5	6.22	8.06	33.6	38.0
20-24,999	18.3	25.8	6.27	8.80	33.7	39.1
25-34,999	17.5	24.1	5.85	7.69	35.2	40.2
35-above	17.8	25.1	5.44	7.87	36.5	40.7

*$p < .05$

Conclusions and Discussion

Significant differences in levels of measured burnout among teachers were evident for two professional variables - grade level and years teaching experience. Neither the class size variable nor highest degree earned variable produced any significant differences among groups. Subsequent t-tests on the grade level and teaching experience factors provided two conclusions, (a) that secondary teachers exhibit a higher level of measured burnout, and (b) that teachers with fewer years teaching experience exhibit a higher level of measured burnout.

Significant indicators that secondary teachers exhibit higher levels of burnout than elementary teachers suggest that working with adolescents in a high school environment may be more stressful than working with younger students, or they may suggest that the environment of the elementary school is more supportive to teachers. Although the opposite hypothesis is held by some, this research indicates that stress gradually increases with the grade level. Whether the cause is content demand, developmental changes in students, or work environment, the higher grade level appears to induce measured burnout.

One partial explanation may be that adult perceptions of failure enter the picture at the secondary level as students fight the system, give up trying, or drop out after years of frustration. Personal feelings of despondency and guilt increase as teachers assume a share of the blame for student failures and dropouts.

Many secondary teachers also have related job responsibilities such as driving buses, coaching whether they are qualified or not, club sponsorship, choral and dramatic direction. Even if they <u>are</u> being paid for the job, the pressures are there.

The finding that teachers with fewer years experience exhibit higher burnout raises concerns as to the maturity level, including coping ability, of younger teachers to handle the daily stress of school. Perhaps teachers have not been sensitized to the stress demands of our profession, nor have they been provided training on coping with these demands. The apparent lack of coping skills on the part of younger teachers gives impetus to the need to identify coping mechanisms established by older teachers to enable them to reduce levels of measured burnout. A reduction in measured burnout exhibited by teachers as they gain experience suggests that certain skills are acquired in the field. This is to be expected within reason, but there may be more that education can do such as place greater emphasis on lab experiences and/or add an emphasis in stress management to the teacher education curriculum.

The researchers recognized the potential interaction of professional and personal factors as catalysts for burnout. Therefore, both types of variables were studied. Personal variables identified as significant included sex, age, and race. Subsequent t-tests provided three conclusions, (a) that females exhibit higher measured burnout than males, (b) that younger teachers exhibit higher measured burnout than their older counterparts, and (c) that white teachers exhibit higher measured burnout than minority group teachers. The finding regarding sex differences raises questions as to the impact of external obligations upon burnout and subsequent teacher performance. Ordinarily, females would be more likely to be effected by family obligations such as care arrangements for children, family buying, etc. These factors may induce stress for many female teachers. The second conclusion was expected since age would ordinarily correlate with years teaching experience. Therefore, the conclusions for the age variable parallel those of the teaching

experience variable. The third conclusion regarding differences in measured burnout between white and minority respondents is perplexing and raises questions regarding (a) the distinctive personality characteristics of the two groups that might provide contrasting modes of coping with stress, (b) differences in type of job assignment and work load, and/or (c) differences in perceptions of teaching roles and expected outcomes. Additional data targeted toward these three questions may provide a better understanding of the finding.

The findings in reference to non-significant personal variables raise several points of interest. The research indicated an absence of measured burnout in relation to class size. This implies that teachers as a group respond to class size with different teaching styles and coping strategies.

Also interesting is the finding that income is not a significant factor in teacher burnout. One explanation may be that low income is a major reason for people leaving the profession. Therefore, those people who remain in teaching are less likely to experience significant stress in regards to income.

In summary, teacher burnout is a widely discussed topic within the educational community. There is, however, little research data available to explain the phenomena and/or help educators understand its impact. The study described herein has attempted to expand the available data in the hope that knowledge regarding the problem will be the first step in solving it.

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